



مركز العودة الفلسطيني
Palestinian Return Centre



RETURN WEEK 2020

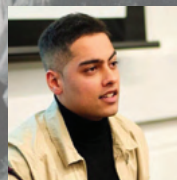
THE INALIENABLE RIGHT: OPENING PANEL

Chair: Shabbir Lakha

Monday, December 7, 2020

The first annual Return Week hosted in its opening panel a number of distinguished speakers who spoke about the inalienable Palestinian right of return.

Note: Following is a verbatim transcription of the speakers' oral contributions delivered in a series of webinars held as part of the "Return Week". For the sake of authenticity, the texts are kept in their original forms, as read out by the speakers. Therefore, any imperfection in terms of the rules of academic writing (sentence structure, grammar, word order, punctuation etc...) stems from the inherent differences between written and oral discourses and the improvisation that occurs as speakers go along.



Chair: Shabbir Lakha

Noura Erakat



Iman Jodeh



Janna Jihad



Miko Peled



Ghada Karmi



Rashid Khalidi



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Shabbir Lakha

Hi welcome everyone to the first ever return week facilitated by the Palestinian Return Centre, which seeks to mobilise Palestinians and allies around the world to call for and support the Palestinian right for return.



Iman Jodeh

My name is Shabir Lakka and I have the honour of chairing tonight's event. I'm an officer with Stop the War Coalition. Palestine is the issue that politicised me many years ago, and has remained central to my political beliefs, and campaigning efforts and I was lucky enough to visit Palestine last year. So I want to start by thanking and congratulating the Palestine Return Centre for putting on such a great week of events, and you saw the promo a second ago, which I think is ever more important today, as the attempts to silence solidarity with Palestine are being ramped up. To that end I want to extend my solidarity with Jeremy Corbyn, and all of those who are currently being attacked for this reason.

Before I get to our brilliant panel of speakers, I want to just mention something about the My Return Campaign, which you would have seen in that video, which you can sign up to at "my return.net". This is a campaign, which is a popular voluntary initiative, launched by the London-based Palestinian Return Centre in cooperation with national and international pro-Palestine Partners. The campaign was first launched in Jordan in cooperation with the Palestine committee in the Jordanian parliament. The campaign culminates in a petition that calls for and reaffirms the Palestinian right of return and seeks to turn such an inalienable right into an international cause.

The campaign seeks to garner the largest possible number of signatories on a petition confirming Palestinian refugees' devotion to their right of return. The petition clearly states that it rejects the U.S.'s deal of the century and any other initiative undermining Palestinians internationally guaranteed rights. Israel and the U.S. have never ceased to undermine such an inalienable right by denying the refugee status of displaced Palestinians inside and outside occupied Palestine.

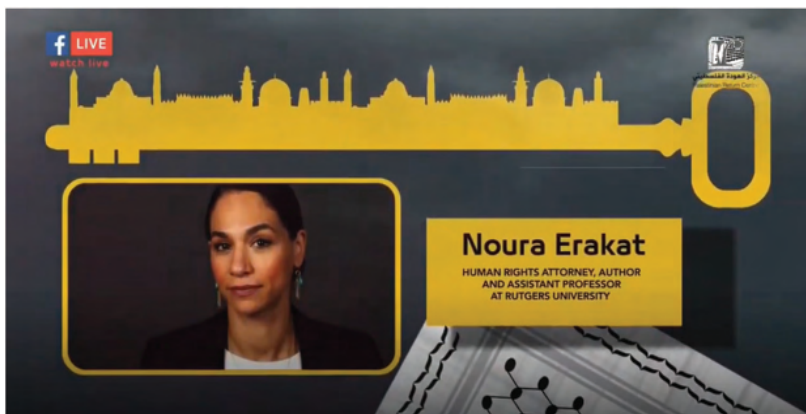
The U.S. president Donald Trump's recognition of occupied Palestine as Israel's capital, which is unlikely to change even after he's gone, and the campaign waged by Israel and the U.S. against UNRWA, the U.S. suspension of its funding to Palestinian refugees and the increasing calls to resettle the refugees in destinations other than Palestine are tactics, which, though seemingly divergent, aim for the same goal which is to undermine the right of return, and that right of return will never be negotiated away or used as a bargaining chip. So, the campaign is based on individual signatures on the "My Return" petition through its official website on "www.myreturn.net".

The petition has already gone at over 000 550 signatures, so please add your name to it and as well as campaigning and adding your name to the petition, you can be proactive in supporting Palestinian human rights, especially the right of return, by, if you have the means, donating to one of the most important organizations on the ground supporting Palestinian refugees—UNRWA—and anything you can donate will go a long way. So it's "donate.unrwa.org".

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So, I'm going to introduce our speakers now and at the end we'll have a question and answer session. So, if you have any questions please put them in the comments and we'll get to them during the Q&A.

So our first speaker, who I'm honoured to introduce is **Noura Erakat**, who is a human rights attorney and assistant professor at Rutgers university. She has served as legal counsel to the U.S. House of Representatives, and as a legal advocate for Palestinian refugee rights. She's a frequent commentator with appearances on CBS news, CNN and Fox news amongst others, and her writings have been widely published in the national media and academic journals. Noura is the author of "Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine", which is the winner of the 2019 Palestine Book Award sponsored by the Middle East Monitor. So, Noura will speak for about 12 or so minutes and yeah over to you Noura.



Noura Erakat

Thank you so much for having me, thank you for everybody who is tuning in. It's really exciting to be part of a transnational effort that emphasizes the inalienable rights of Palestinian refugees, which is a testament, yet again, that you know despite the mantras, Zionist mantras that the old will die and the young will forget, in fact Palestine continues to live on in all of us often times through a memory or the memories of our grandparents and yet in so many ways is one of the things that defines us.

I want to dedicate my remarks to thinking through what is, how is it that we think through the question of refugees, and what it means in the particular case of Palestinians. In so many ways it is an exceptional case study because of the ways that it's been made an exception and yet a very universal example of the case of being refugees anywhere in the world. So what about it that is particular? what about it that is exceptional? and what does it mean for our collective future for liberation?

So let me start really quickly in emphasizing that the primary work of British colonial intervention as the mandatory power in Palestine, was to declare that the Palestinians, that were there, were in fact not a people; there was no controversy that there were people there. It was why lord Balfour could say that you know the whims and desires of some seven hundred thousand Arabs are non-significant in the face of the noble cause of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. It's not that anyone denied that there were Palestinians there, or denied that it was the majority population, or denied that it was an indigenous population. What was being denied was the legal status as an international people with the right to self-determination, that was basically, and remains so, in the 21st century remains so the primary call you know, the primary way that we organize ourselves within the body of nation states. But in one kind of just one act of, you know, pen, the negation of Palestinians as a people as appears in the Balfour declaration where they are referred to as basically the "non-Jewish persons" in the land is tantamount to establishing Palestinians, the intense amount to erasing the juridical status of Palestinians and their right to peoplehood. And then once it's incorporated into the Palestine mandate, which is the league of nations mandate system, that's established in order to oversee the development of the vanquished territories of the German and Ottoman empires into independent states.

It is what establishes by exception that the Palestinians, unlike their counterparts and other mandates, be it in Syria, Jordan, Iraq or beyond, would not enjoy a similar fate of being able to enjoy the right to self-determination.

It is this colonial erasure that is enshrined into the Palestine mandate, as a matter of international law and policy, which thereby establishes Palestine as an exception not only in the way that we talk about exceptions in our vernacular, but as an exception within the legal meaning of exception, whereby precedent, analogy, facts are insufficient to overcome the mistreatment and the denial of Palestinian self-determination. It is why Palestinian struggle and continue to struggle, not only for the right to self-determination but as a necessary precedent the right to exist, we exist.

So, the struggle of Palestinians is defined by a struggle to define ourselves as a people as existing, and this is primarily what the Palestinian liberation organization achieves and achieves with great victory in cooperation with the rest of the third world in establishing that the Palestinians are a people with the right to self-determination that negates their denial of juridical status, come 1974 when they entered the United Nation foray in passing resolution 3237 that recognizes the Palestinian liberation organization, as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.



That resolution not only you know made it intersubjective to the world that Palestinians are a people, but also laid claim that Palestine would not just be a derivative of an Arab nationalist struggle, but would be a specific national struggle, whereby Palestinians would oversee and determine their own future not for example as toward of Jordan or any other Arab country that laid claim to these territories. This was quite significant and it also passed in that same year resolution 3236, which overcame the same juridical erasure that was established in resolution 242 of the UN Security Council, which was passed unanimously, including with a vote by Egypt and Jordan in 1967, that reified the erasure of Palestinians, that they just don't exist as a people, when the entire resolution refers to Palestinians as a refugee problem.

So, here I want to emphasize that between 1917 at the passage of the Balfour declaration or 1922 through the establishment of the Israeli state, Palestinians were vying for their national independence. We're provisionally recognized, we're engaged in a legal battle, we're engaged in outright rebellion. The history of Palestine and Palestinians is a history of resistance. When that doesn't amount to our collective liberation between 1948 and 1968 when the Palestinian militant factions took over the PLO to lead it and led by Yasir Arafat is the head of one particular militant faction which is Fateh, the Palestinians are known as a refugee problem. We are a humanitarian case that only needs to be fed and clothed and educated but were not known as a political struggle, again, with the right to self-determination.

So, when in 1967 security resolution 242 was passed again, they were referred to as a humanitarian issue but not as a political struggle, that happens in 1974. So, what of our refugees? What are the debates inherent there. We'll first understand that the removal of Palestinians was a predicate element to establishing Israel and it's not that they didn't know that we were there, but precisely because we were there, there was the idea of establishing not only a Jewish demographic majority, but a demographic majority of 80 percent. Coexistence was not ever possible in a Zionist vision the reverse is not true, the reverse has never been true in terms of a Palestinian vision for a collective future. When Israel applies for its membership within the United Nations it has to apply three times, and its application is rejected because it has an established permanent peace with other Arab belligerent countries, because the status of Jerusalem is still negated, because the international community wanted Jerusalem as an international capital in Israel, wanted it as the capital of Israel and because of the Palestinians would become refugees who demanded their right to return.

In the courts, voting Israel as a member of state and allowing it to return, one of the conditions for that return is that the Palestinian refugee issue would be resolved and Israel from the beginning as articulated by its diplomats the U.N. At the time, Abba Eban never recognized the Palestinian refugees were the responsibility of Israel or that the removal was the responsibility of Israel and hence produced this mythology that either Arab states asked them to leave or that they left on their own in order to destroy the nascent state and so on and so forth.

And, yet, what the amazing work of historians and anthropologists and other researchers has shown, was that this was a deliberate policy, that even though we don't necessarily have the smoking gun from Ben Gurion, except for a few case studies, as in Deir Yassin and as in the lid where the order was to remove the Palestinians, that they were removed, that they were removed intentionally and that, though they did it under the veneer of defensive force, that they were removed as a predicate element to establishing the state of Israel and the responsibility for them was denied. Fast forward to the present, as Palestinians who have not died even as our elder generations have passed away, that memory has not died, that struggle has not died, and the struggle for return has not ended. And what we've seen in the last four years under the Trump administration is the realization of a number of you know Israel agenda items on Israel's movement for ethnic cleansing, including redefining who is a Palestinian refugee and this is the specific targeting of UNRWA.

So, UNRWA is established alongside the UNCCP in 1949, in order to provide relief for Palestinians. While the UNCCP was there to provide for a political strategy, as the UNCCP dissolved into obedience, the UNRWA remained intact. UNRWA precedes the establishment of the UNHCR but both refugee agencies define refugees in the exact same way which is that all refugees and their descendants will be registered as refugees and among the mythologies is to deny that descendants of Palestinian refugees also have a right to self-determination. That Zionist victory could not be held in order to negate the status of the descendants of Palestinian refugees. What happens instead, is what we see the Trump administration doing, which is basically defunding UNRWA, and the idea being is that if UNRWA goes away so too will Palestinian refugees go away, and they have not and that funding gap has been filled and UNRWA is not what defines Palestinian refugees, it's they that define themselves. On this issue, it's important to highlight that Palestinians are also oftentimes and this may be done inadvertently here as we discuss refugees, they remain their humanitarian condition and need humanitarian relief, but that does not negate in any way the political call, and the political call does not in any way negate their humanitarian condition and we must hold these things in tension.

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I'll end by saying something that I have found in come to you know my own conclusions about this issue when I think about Palestinian refugees which is that we often define the return of refugees as the culmination of our freedom movement, because Palestinian refugees have gone home, but what I want to emphasize and urge us all to think about is that the return of refugees should mark the beginning of our liberation struggle and not the end of it. Because it's when Palestinian refugees have come home that begins our struggle to determine what our collective future looks like, what a new society looks like, how Jews fit in that society because as we've said over and over again Jewish Israelis can remain, they just can't remain as our masters, they just can't remain as a dominant legal status in an apartheid situation. So then what are we offering? What does that future look like? How do we live together? How are Palestinians repatriated? What is the work of that radical imagination? And how much more of it can we do?

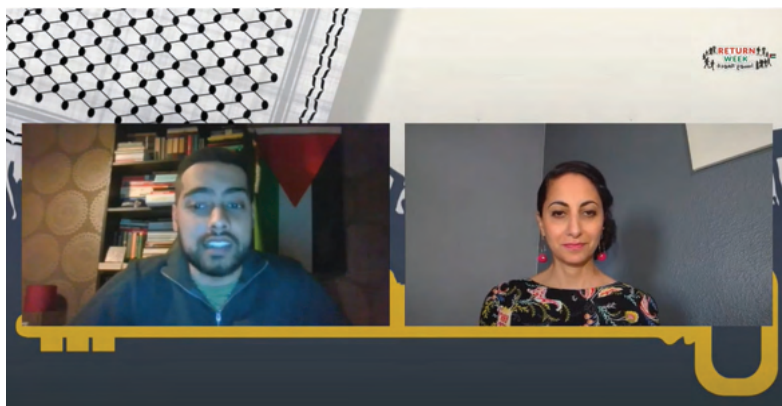
There are many organizations that are already doing this like BADIL, like Zuchrot, who are doing it collectively but also like individual initiatives who are doing it. It's done in the work of our researchers, it's done in the work of science fiction like a "100+Palestine stories" that you know uses science fiction to imagine this future and it's important to emphasize that our struggle is not unique in this way when we engage in this work of radical imagination, we're joining indigenous peoples all over the world who have also suffered their juridical erasure, in order to make room for a settler sovereign in their place. We are also joining many African descendant peoples all over the world, who are imagining an optimal future because they do not have an optimal past to return to. So, we are not an exception despite all efforts to exceptionalize us, and despite all the things that render us quite different from the rest of the world, and so we should take faith that in our liberation struggle we are not alone, that as we struggle for ourselves we're also struggling for a future that's better for everyone. Thank you.



Shabbir Lakha

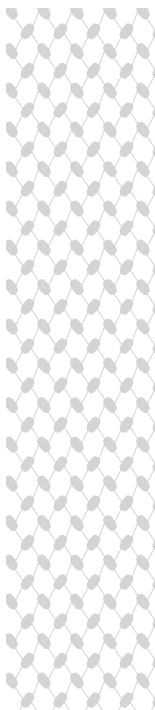
Thanks so much Noura, that was absolutely brilliant and you made so many great points, but I think especially you know highlighting the root of the issue in western imperialism and that the history of Palestinians is a history of struggle, which isn't dead as you rightly say, and that there is so much shared solidarity. Thanks a lot Noura that was absolutely brilliant.

Our next speaker is **Iman Jodeh**, who is the representative elect for the house district 41 in Aurora, Colorado. She's a first generation American, born to Palestinian immigrants and refugees. She's the first Muslim and Arab woman elected to the Colorado state legislature. Iman is the founder and executive director of the locally based non-profit Meet the Middle East (MTME), which fosters relationships between the U.S. and the Middle East, through education and immersion travel. Iman lectured at the university of Denver's University College enrichment program and taught the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from ancient history to today's headlines, as well as "Life Under Occupation: a Palestinian perspective and Islam 101".



Iman Jodeh

Thank you so much and thank you for having me. Noura Erakat that was amazingly put and so eloquent. Thank you so much for your continued advocacy and thank you everyone who's tuning in today and watching. My name is Iman Jodeh and I am the representative elect right here in Aurora Colorado in the United States. The ceiling, the glass ceiling that we broke this past November here in the United States by electing women, women of colour here in Aurora by electing the first Muslim and Arab woman to represent one of the most diverse cities in America means that change is on the horizon. As a Palestinian-American, as a practicing Muslim, as a woman of colour, it is not lost upon me that there is a shared kinship when it comes to oppression. Unfortunately, here in the United States, we are combating many of these oppressions in this administration, when it comes to living behind walls, when it comes to police oppression, when it comes to black lives matter, when it comes to injustices around jobs, education health care, and police reform.



The reality is though that because we have this kinship and oppression, that these issues are not exclusive to America. As a Palestinian and as a future lawmaker here in Colorado, this kinship that we share in oppression are the same things that my Palestinian brothers and sisters are living every day in Palestine and when you inherit a conflict that your parents live through, that your grandparents lived through, a heritage that is threatened then you feel like you have an obligation to advocacy and to social justice to preserve that heritage, to preserve that history, so that future generations can revel in the fact knowing that those before them stood up against oppression, and stood up for the inalienable rights of human beings everywhere.

When I talk about the kinship in oppression we have to recognize that each person, each group of people that experiences oppression have experiences respective to their own group of people. As Palestinians, like Noura so eloquently said, we have experiences that have spanned generations. But what's unfortunate is that many of those same oppressions are being mimicked all over the world, whether it's Tibet in South Africa and South America, or right here in America. I often tell people that the injustice is that I live a half a world away when I am in Palestine, having my civil rights revoked, not having the right to vote being a second class citizen, living behind a wall, being subject to searching detention, being denied access to places of worship. Being a victim of oppression, occupation, apartheid and subject to checkpoints, are all things that again are not just exclusive to Palestine, but are being felt by our black brown indigenous, and people of colour communities here in Colorado, here in America, and all around the world. We need to come together to share in this oppression, to fight for human rights, and to make sure that we end these oppressions all over the world.

When I decided to run for office, I had been advocating for years at the Colorado state capital, and I never advocated because I wanted to run for office; I advocated because quite frankly, and I think many people watching can relate to this, as Palestinians we have a sense of obligation to be socially active, to be advocates of justice and lovers of democracy. We inherit this innate ability to educate people, to advocate and to fight oppression and apartheid. I harnessed that and elevated that ability into a campaign and into a representative, but I also happened to be a lawmaker, who is a practicing Muslim Palestinian-American. And I want to make sure that I'm able to use those skills and those passions that we inherited from our parents, from our grandparents, to defend democracy, to defend those that don't have a voice so that we are continuing to fight for social justice and all people who are oppressed, no matter where they live. As Palestinians we have an obligation, because we know what it's like to have these rights stripped from us, as we continually see and live.

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This is what I want to do here, and inshallah one day maybe I can take it even further. But if I can sit here in Colorado and make laws, as a practicing Muslim Palestinian woman of colour, then, hopefully, I can also start to break down the stigma around being Palestinian, around being Muslim around what is actually happening to our Muslim brothers and sisters, to our Palestinian brothers and sisters on the ground. If I can start to break down that stigma, that systemic racism around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, around what it means to have the right of return, around what it means to have civil and human rights upheld by the Geneva conventions; if I can establish these relationships, and start to educate people, through these relationships and maybe one day we can also start to break away from this oppression and this apartheid. I want to thank everyone who tuned in today, and who's continuing to be allies and stand in solidarity with the Palestinians and the Palestinian movement. Thank you so much.



Shabbir Lakha

Thank you so much Iman, that was excellently put, and I think it's especially important to make that connection about systemic racism. I think in the year where we've seen these massive mobilizations around black lives matter, there is an inherent solidarity there so that's very important, and I forgot to say at the beginning, but obviously congratulations on your election and good luck with your fight, and we, you know, we stand behind you.

Our next speaker is **Janna Jihad**, who is an activist and is known for being the world's youngest journalist. She's a resident of the village of Nabi Saleh in the occupied west bank. Janna regularly participates in demonstrations against the Israeli occupation, and she began making videos of what was happening in a village when she was only seven, and I'm sure most of you will have seen her videos like I have. Over to you Janna.





Janna Jihad

Thank you so much! First of all, I just want to thank you all for giving me this opportunity to talk about such a very important issue, because you know the right of return is extremely important for us, Palestinians. So, first of all, I personally, my family is very lucky to not have faced such discrimination and such violation because you know we've been living in Nabi Saleh, which is a very small village in the West Bank for so many years, unlike so many other Palestinian families who have been displaced from their cities, from their villages, from Haifa, Yaffa and Akka and so many more. I believe everyone here you know could imagine how hard it is, and how hard it was for them to get kicked out of their lands. For a person, you know, to leave all their belongings, all their hopes, all their dreams, all their memories in a place, because a person just came and kicked them out of their land. I have so many friends who have been descendants from the people who have been kicked out of their lands. So, you know I always go and hear their grandparents' stories when they were kicked out during the Nakba 1948. How they left their houses and thought you know they are just going to be leaving their houses for a couple of days like a week maximum and it's been 72 years since the Nakba 1948, and they haven't returned to their houses, they haven't returned to their neighborhood, they haven't returned to their villages, and you know they were living in such beautiful houses next to the beach, a very humble and beautiful life and then suddenly out of nowhere just became refugees living in extremely hard and bad conditions in refugee camps. Not having a place to call home, not having a state, and even you know here in Palestine in the West Bank and in Gaza, there are refugee camps for those who have been kicked out of Yaffa and Haifa and so many more and have been living in refugee camps in the West bank and in Gaza.

So, just imagine them having to go through all of that and on top of that living in under occupation, under the blockade in Gaza, being denied statehood and treated like second-class citizens because of this occupation. So, you know because this issue is just extremely important to us as Palestinians and as Shamsan, we, you know, I'm the ambassador of Shamsan, which is an initiative that we've created a couple years ago. We also have been doing so many campaigns to try and you know send these people's voices to the world and send their stories to the world. We also worked on campaigns concerning the right of return.

In the past couple years we worked on campaigns like our "Global Walk" on November 19, we got children from all over the world even Palestinian refugees from Lebanon, from Jordan, from America, from a lot of places around the world and we got together and we walked for freedom at the same time. What was beautiful about that is that we were all united, we had this common feeling, we had this shared feeling of hope that you know one day we will go back to our lands, one day we will go back to our houses. We are also working on a new

campaign with Master Kg. I don't know you've probably heard of the song that just got released a couple of months ago "Jerusalem" talking about Jerusalem of course our capital. A lot of people around the world, a lot of Palestinians around the world, and activists have been you know just dancing to this song and we all have also a shared feeling that we all want to go back to Jerusalem, we all want to visit Jerusalem, the people who have been displaced from Jerusalem, the Palestinian people who can see the churches and the mosques in Jerusalem from the rooftops of their houses, and that have never been there because of the occupation. We all have this feeling that we want to go back to our land, we want to visit our capital, we want to see our you know country.

I also like you know as a teenager, as a Palestinian child, I would like to also you know talk about the fourth generation after the Nakba you know the fourth generation right now is technically my age, so we could also try to think about how hard it is for them to be living like that. To be first of all refugees in maybe Palestine or Jordan or Lebanon or Syria or so many other places around the world, and not having a place to call home. Having an unknown identity because you know they could have been living in Haifa, in a beautiful street but they don't know, they've never visited, they don't know how their house looks like, they don't know how their neighbourhood looks like. They might be thinking about how their life might have been without this occupation, how their life might have been in these places but instead they're living in refugee camps; they're living in very bad conditions, being denied health care, or having extremely hard you know lives, not being given the right to education or maybe you know having difficulties finding work having, difficulties you know to get their basic fundamental human rights. We could just you know think about how these children are living, what these children are thinking, and how these children are finding hope, because like a lot of my friends are refugees and when I whenever I go to their houses and see their grandparents, their grandma's always wearing her thobe and having like this key necklace as a necklace on her neck. Whenever you just ask her she's like one day we'll return and this is the key to my house. These are the papers that you know show that this land is literally my parents land or my grandparents land. It's beautiful because it also gives this generation hope to resist and to continue fighting for the right to return to their actual land, for the right to find their actual identity.

I want to point out something that is very important, which is that you know we might think that the Nakba has ended in 1948, but like you know the Nakba is literally continuing. People are getting displaced, ethnic cleansing, silent displacement. For example, today I don't know you probably heard about the annexation plan a couple months ago, and it is literally being performed right now in Jericho. For example, today, the Israeli occupation went to like an area of 35,000

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acres I think in Jericho and they were like you know looking at it and planning things because they were planning to annex it. Just let's think about all these families that are living in these areas that you know at any moment the Israeli occupation might come demolish their house, and they might become refugees at any moment. It's extremely scary and this is what is happening to Palestinians all the time.

Even right now like during these days people's houses are getting demolished, people are just newly becoming refugees and having to deal with what a lot of people have dealt with, a lot of Palestinians have dealt with during the Nakba. I believe that we all should keep fighting and resisting in our own way, to give these people their fundamental and basic human rights and stop all these violations of their rights because why would a child live like that? We just want to live our childhood; we want to live like every other human right around the world. And I hope that we could all unite to make this world of peace, a world of love a world of equality and justice and to give these people the right to return to their houses and to go back to their villages in neighbourhood. Thank you for listening.

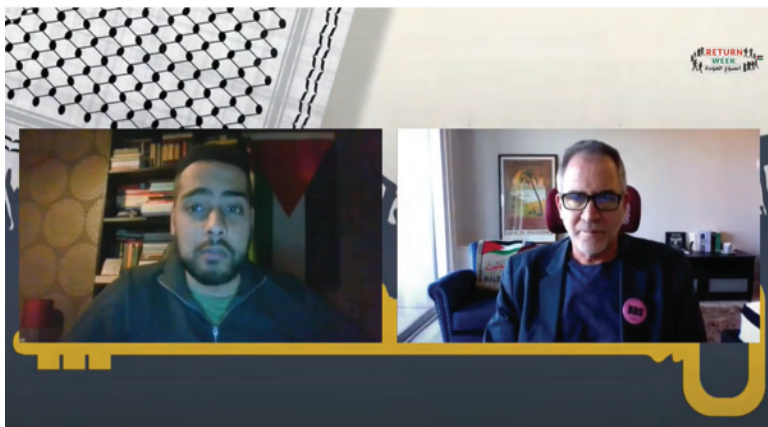


Shabbir Lakha

Wow that was really very powerful! Thank you so much Jannah, and yeah you are such an inspiration. So, keep doing what you're doing and all solidarity with you, thank you. I believe we are now going to take a short break and watch a couple of videos before returning to our final speakers. So we'll see you in a few minutes.

Welcome back everyone, I hope you didn't go anywhere. It's been a fantastic event so far and we have a few speakers left. I've seen from the comments that we have people from around the world tuned in. So, welcome to everyone and I hope you're enjoying the event so far.

Our next speaker is **Miko Peled**, who is a writer and human rights activist, born and raised in Jerusalem. He's considered by many to be one of the clearest voices calling for justice in Palestine and in support of the Palestinian call for boycott divestment and sanctions, and the creation of a single democracy with equal rights on all historic Palestine. He's the author of "The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine" and "Injustice: The Story of the Holy Land Foundation Five". Over to you Miko.



Miko Peled

Thank you so much, and thank you for inviting me and allowing me to be part of this fantastic event with all these really wonderful speakers. It's really an honour and it's inspiring in spite of all the difficulties and the COVID19- and so on, to still be able to be you know part of this community and to be out there and to speak and think. Thank you, the organizers you're doing a fantastic job. This is incredibly, incredibly important and I think it's incredibly timely as well. The issue of the return, the issue of the right of the refugees to return is a crucial one and because it's so crucial it's being attacked from all directions it's being pushed to the background. It has been pushed to the background for many decades and I think it's incumbent upon all people who care for justice, all people who care for equality, and all people who believe in the right of all humans to live freely, to push forward the issue of the Palestinian refugee, the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, their land and be compensated and paid reparations.

A wonderful book has just been published recently called "Palestinian Refugees in International Law", published by Oxford University press. It's a rather lengthy and very detailed and very important book, I believe. I wrote a review if anybody just wants to see the kind of the shorter version it's on MintPress News. But it basically outlines several really, really important things that are always left outside of the conversation.

For example, the right of the refugees has not been weakened; the right to return the strength of their case has not been weakened, with years with the passing of time. In fact, it has become stronger and stronger with the passing of time.



The responsibility of the Zionist organizations in the state of Israel, who caused this crime, who committed the crime of the ethnic cleansing and created the refugee issue, the refugee problem - I hate calling it a problem these are human beings they're not a problem - but created this reality where so many millions of Palestinians have to live as refugees. They're just as culpable as they were, because they already broke the law when they committed this act when they began in 1948 and of course they have never stopped.

They make also a point because it comes in the face of the myth, the myth that somehow the Zionists came to Palestine and made this desert bloom and they demonstrate precisely what the Palestinians describe in Arabic "أخذوها مفروشة" - the Zionist took Palestine fully furnished". It was a land that was well cultivated, people who had an enormous amount of country that had enormous amount of wealth they took the cultivated lands, they took the produce from the lands, they made enormous amounts of money which allowed them to begin you know create a functioning state very very quickly.

Because of that the land, the private property, the common property, the actual money in people's banks account, I mean the details are fascinating and horrifying to see just how much the Zionists and the state of Israel had actually stolen when they took Palestine in 1948 and of course they've never stopped that. This is the process that keeps going the stealth of land, the stealth of property. They even have a figure which, with billions and billions of dollars, which they say is a conservative figure as to how much is owed to the Palestinians by the state of Israel and by the Zionist organizations that were responsible for the Nakba, responsible for the creation of refugees and I think I mean in terms of the details of the horror, in terms of the injustice, in terms of the fact that the refugee Palestinians have a right, an inalienable right, a right that cannot be argued, cannot be taken away to return to their homes and their land and to be paid restitution compensation.

I think other people have made that case, and I think this, like I said this book that I just mentioned, makes the case. And I think what's the issue here is though what is lacking, what is problematic is that there is no political pressure being applied, which is why I like to wear the BDS Pin because I think in many ways the Palestinian call for boycott divestment and sanctions and the very clear and very specific demands of the call for BDS bring this thing around to the need for political action. There has to be political action the reason the Palestinian refugees have been treated very differently than other refugees around the world, the reason their rights are not being that they're not being that they're not able to return when the rights are being ignored are political. It's because the state of Israel and the Zionist organizations throughout the world are holding them hostage.

They've banned them from return and they're creating a reality, a political reality around the world where nobody has the courage to stand up and say the refugees have a right to return, the refugees must be allowed to return. This is done through all the different lobby groups that we're all aware of, the AIPAC here in the United States, and the ADIL and others. and then there's the board of deputies of British Jews in the UK and other groups and then of course there are others in other countries. They lobby very very hard. They work very very hard to make sure that this issue is never brought to the forefront, is never brought to the table and when somebody does mention it they either get blamed or being accused or being examined or some other issues come up and they kind of, you know, throw one of these, you know, create a smoke screen and then the diversion and talk about something else. As though there's anything that could possibly push this issue farther back, it's already as far back as could possibly be, and I think it's incumbent upon all people of conscience to push it forward to the forefront and that's precisely I believe what with the call for boycott divestment and sanctions what BDS does, because the return of the refugees is one of the demands and it is a very clear demand.

Another thing that comes up in this wonderful book "Palestinian Refugees in International Law" is the fact that resolution 194, the United Nations resolution, has been affirmed and reaffirmed many many times more than any other resolution and that the reason this has not come to fruition that the actual return of the free refugees has never actually taken place, is because of political reasons, it's because of the influence of the Zionist groups around the world, that are really making it an impossibility. So, I would encourage people again to remember that there cannot be a real resolution of the question of Palestine, there cannot be justice brought to Palestine, without the issue of the refugees being discussed and discussed not in a way that is theoretical, not in a way that is somehow utopian and one day perhaps you know our great grandchildren will see that kind, we need to talk about it in very concrete terms.

There needs to be political pressure applied, very very strong political pressure applied not just on Israel, but on members of elected members of you know of the elected representatives. Whether it's the house of representatives here in the United States in the senate, whether it's the elected representatives or even non-elected political figures throughout the world, to push for this issue to make it front and centre, and to make it absolutely clear that what is going to be required is a strong push for boycott divestment and sanctions against the state of Israel. In other words, we cannot take any one issue and even the issue of the refugees and isolate it, not because it's not important, but because nothing is going to happen until everything takes place.



There's a process that needs to happen so that the issue of refugees comes front and centre so that there's an actual plan that there's an actual materialization of this right of refugees and I think Noura Erakat mentions, I believe it was her, she mentioned Zochrot, and they have envisioned a return project, where you actually young people are actually envisioning what the villages are going to look like, what the towns are going to look like, and of course they keep the memory alive, they're keeping the memory alive of the towns and villages that were destroyed during the Nakba. So everything ties back I believe back to political action, to political activism, to the incredibly important work the different groups just like you guys and many of the speakers here are doing around the world to bring Palestine back to the forefront, to make people absolutely understand what justice for Palestine means, to make it clear that the crimes being committed by Israel are not part, in other words they cannot be separated from the entire creation of the state of Israel. In other words, the way I would put it is the state of Israel does not commit violations of international law, the state of Israel does not commit crimes against humanity, the state of Israel is the violation of international law, the state of Israel is the crime against humanity, because the creation of this of a racist apartheid regime through brutal means that don't need to be detailed right now but have been detailed by many of the speakers here in other forums, is exactly the problem.

This is the issue, the state of Israel is the crime, the Zionist regime in Palestine has no legitimacy, now maybe some people would like to believe that it did at one point or that it could have none of this matters at this point. At this point, we know that there are over five million Palestinian men and women and children languishing in refugee camps in horrible conditions, only because the state of Israel has banned them from return, kicked them out to begin with and now has banned them from return. There's a reality in Palestine, that it is being destroyed on a regular basis day by day, by this Zionist regime, by this racist violent apartheid regime, that is the state of Israel every single day and that needs to stop. The whole, the entire operation needs to be brought to its knees and brought down and then what needs to take place is a transformation into a real democracy. A real democracy with equal rights is really the first level, the first step from which we can resolve all of the other issues.

The creation of a single state with equal rights, or even the calling for one person one vote elections for all people who live within the Jordan river and the Mediterranean sea in historic Palestine; These actions will lead us to the point where we can create a reality, or a reality can be created to allow the refugees a mechanism that will allow the refugees to return. In other words, a mechanism has to be put in place to allow them to return, to enable them to return, and again these are things that have been done before we don't have to reinvent the wheel, but that there's a reality here that needs to happen. Again, I can't overemphasize

just how important this issue is, I can't overemphasize how important the work that you are all doing, the organizers and of course all the wonderful guests and speakers, and I refer everybody back to boycott divestment and sanctions to the right of refugees to return, along with the demand for equality and the end of military rule in Palestine.

I believe that if we do all act as we should and widen our circle, broaden our circle and organize at this particular point in history. As this year is coming to an end and a new one is about to start, as one you know administration the U.S. is ending and another one is about to start, we have an opening here that I believe we need to push our foot in and barge this door open, so that we can talk about this issue and make it front and centre as it should be. Thank you all very much.



Shabbir Lakha

Thank you so much Miko, that was absolutely brilliant and I think you're absolutely right, and I think the issue particularly of refugees really cuts to the heart of you know what Israel really is.

I think that's one thing which you know the kind of the people who are trying to silence solidarity with Palestine often uses; It's not that we don't want to criticize Israel but you know talking about Israel as a state or its right to exist as it is etc, is not allowed and I think we need to be loud and bold in our anti-Zionism and make these arguments that you've just made and put them front and centre exactly like you said. Thanks again that was really great.

Our next speaker is **Dr Ghada Karmi**, who is a Palestinian doctor, academic and author. She writes frequently on Palestinian issues in The Guardian, The Nation and Journal of Palestine Studies. She's a fellow and lecturer at the institute of Arab and Islamic studies at the university of Exeter. Her many publications include her acclaimed memoir "In Search of Fatima" which chronicles her family's expulsion from Palestine to Britain in 1948. Over to you Dr. Ghada.



RETURN WEEK 2020



Ghada Karmi

Right, thank you very much and a big thank you to the organizers of this wonderful event. It's amazing that a whole week will be given to the very important subject of the right of return. Now of course I'm well aware, as a lot of you must be, that we are very close to two very important anniversaries in the Palestinian calendar: The first is December the 9th, which is the date on which the General Assembly decided to set up UNRWA; December the 9th 1948. And the second, a few days after, that is December the 11th, which is the anniversary of UN General Assembly Resolution 194, which is the resolution that established the right of Palestinians to return to their homes.

We're really at a very important time in the year, to be talking about this subject. One thing that occurred to me, people might like to hear, is how it was when there was no UNRWA. You see the Palestinians had already been expelled and were still fleeing by the time that the decision was made to set up UNRWA. In those early days there was no formalized institution or structure to look after them. I want to give you a taste of that from my own experience. My family fled from our home in Jerusalem in April 1948, that is before May 1948, which is of course the date of the first Arab-Israeli war. We and a third of Palestine's population had by then been forced out of our homes, so before the war of 1948 a third of Palestine's population had already had to leave their homes. Now we, for various family reasons, were able to take refuge with my grandfather in Damascus and when we arrived in April 1948 the place was full of fellow Palestinians coming many of them from Safad and from other places, it was full. Now in our part of Damascus, where my grandfather lived, it's not a rich part; It's a poor quarter in the city. The Palestinians, displaced Palestinians, were being housed by the people, so they put them up in mosques, in schools, in people's own homes with the most outstanding generosity and hospitality. It was extremely impressive such an effort because the government was overwhelmed, there was no formal structure as I say to look after the refugees so you know here we have the story before there was an UNRWA, so when UNRWA was set up and when it started operating in 1949 it was indeed a unique organization, because it's unique to the Palestinians, there is no other thing for any other group of refugees.

UNRWA was set up on the understanding that it was temporary, that's why it has to have its mandate renewed every three years. Well, of course, you can see why they thought it was temporary at the time, because they wouldn't be needed for that length of time, if the right of return had ever been implemented, it would never be needed and it certainly shouldn't be in existence today, but it is and it's the largest U.N agency: 3000 employees; 15 operating 59 camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, Gaza and it's a big operation, 5.6 million registered refugees. As people of course will be aware funding for this organization is crucial, because although I would say it shouldn't exist anymore, because we should all have gone home, but it does exist and thank God it does, because it provides

crucial services to the Palestinians. In order to do that, it has to rely on voluntary funding from the member states of the United Nations, amongst its largest donors was the U.S. and the EU. Now in 2019, President Trump decided to stop funding UNRWA and of course the organization has struggled since, and why is all that? why do we have an UNRWA and why are we not home? For the very reason that everybody knows and that Miko was talking about just now, Zionism.

I mean the fact that actually UNRWA was set up, that after UNRWA 1949, the state of Israel was recognised by the United Nations, is all down to, I believe, two factors, which operate in the international arena and which have caused us a lot of problems. The first is that there is a misunderstanding of the nature of Zionism, I really believe that. I think many of the states that sign on the dotted line whenever Israel turns up and wants something or wants support or whatever it is, do so and have done so for decades based on a lack of understanding of the nature of Zionism, what kind of a force this is? How it operates? How it works? And how damaging it is?

And secondly, of course at the time, we're talking about 1949-1948. This was a short time after the ending of the second world war, so the Holocaust was fresh in the western mind and there was a sense of collective obligation to make up to the Jews who had suffered because of the Holocaust. Palestine was designated to be part of the consolation for the losses in the Holocaust and for the terrible thing that happened to European Jews and everything else that has followed since. On this reading, my reading is really very much motivated by those very early misconceptions about what was really happening with the Zionist project in Palestine. I don't know how much more time I've got, but let me just say a few concluding important remarks, something. I was asked to speak about UNRWA and of course it is in a very short time that one can convey how much this organization does for the Palestinians, and has done. But what of the future? Do we really want a situation in which an UNRWA is required? why therefore do we not bend our minds to the aim of making sure that UNRWA becomes redundant? And why? Because the Palestinians displaced by the creation of the state of Israel will be on their way home, and I very much want to echo something Miko's talking about. It's something that I've written about I believe in very strongly; It's not a message that many people like to hear, but we need to find a way forward about this. Okay ! We can, I can imagine us meeting next year and we a year after that and talking about the right of return.

Well, we need to put all our energies now in trying to make it happen. There may be many ideas on how that might be and I know Salman Abu Sitta is speaking later in this week, who has a very ingenious and very impressive idea about how refugees and these people can be fitted back in Palestine. I'm talking about how do you get that to happen. It's the how do you get it to happen, once the people are on their way back then we can talk about how we might organize that situation.



Now I want to end on this note that first I hope it won't take us too much longer to find the way to implement the right of return, because at the same time as there is a lot of enthusiasm and determination on the part of so many Palestinians, never to forget what happened to them, never to forget their right to return, at the same time as that, there is another thing happening and that worries me very much that is resignation. The idea that our will, our great-grandchildren may see that time when we go home but not in my lifetime and you know it's a lovely idea but you know what can we do and we get on with our lives as if there was no right to return. The longer the situation goes on, the greater the proportion of Palestinians who might start to talk like this. I'm not saying that they will. I'm saying this is a real danger and we have to stop that and we have to stop it by making a determined energetic effort on looking at how we can do it.

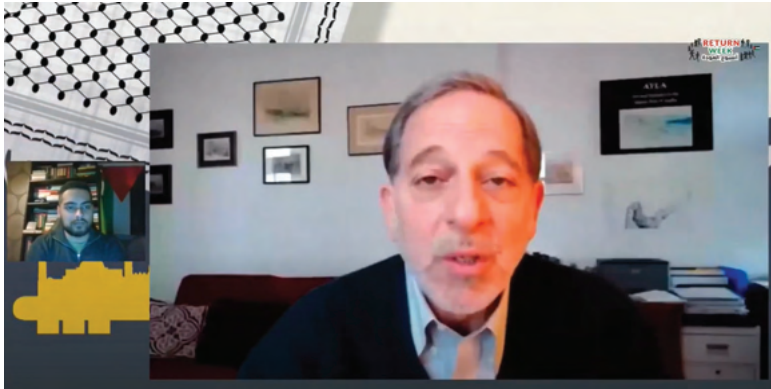
I happen to be a believer in the aim of equal rights for all the people that Israel rules between the River and the Sea. The first step in the process of return is for the people living currently under Israeli rule, in an apartheid situation, to demand equal rights, so that that apartheid situation starts to end. That is the first step. Obviously, we can then imagine that if that were to happen, and it's very difficult of course, is them to happen we would then lead on to a democratic setup where the people of the country have a parliament that represents them; And once that happens, then the needs and requirements of the constituents of that state, most importantly the right of return, will be in the hands of at least half of the population of the new democratic state. I really hope that we get working on this as fast as possible because time is against us. Thank you.



Shabbir Lakha

Thank you so much Dr. Ghada. I absolutely agree with what you said and I think that the urgency and the need for us to put our, you know, our efforts into this right now is absolutely right and that's what we must endeavour to do.

Thank you so much and our final speaker is **Rashid Khalidi**, who unfortunately can't join us live but he sent in a pre-recorded message, which is what he would have said if he was able to. I'll just quickly introduce him and then we'll go over to his video. Rashid Khalidi is the Edward Saeed professor of modern Arab studies at Colombia University. He received a BA from Yale University in 1970, and a DPhil from Oxford University in 1974 and has taught at the American University of Beirut and the University of Chicago. He was president of the Middle East Studies Association, is co-editor of the Journal of Palestine Studies. He served as an advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid and Washington Arab-Israeli peace negotiations from October 91 to June 93, and he's the author of eight books with his most recent book being "The Hundred Years' War in Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 2017-1917". He's a very accomplished individual and I look forward to hearing what he has to say. So, over to the video.



Rashid Khalidi

: I'd like to talk a little bit about a couple of things that come up in my recent book "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine" and which relate to the issue that concerns everybody, I think, or should concern everybody, which is the issue of return. Specifically, those who were forced from their homes in Palestine, their right to return and the circumstances in which they might be able to. I'm not going to talk specifically about that topic, even though it is the main issue that we are all concerned with as Palestinians and as supporters of human rights, and which all of you I'm sure are concerned with who are involved in return week.

I just want to put this in context; The reason that we have to discuss the issue of return, is because a project to essentially ethnically cleanse Palestine of as many as possible of its indigenous original Arab inhabitants drove a very large proportion of the Palestinian people, in fact more than half of them, from their homes in 1948. This is the origin of the problem, the establishment of this Zionist project to establish a Jewish state and in the words of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, one of the first leaders of Zionism, to turn Palestine into the land of Israel. It was in furtherance of that project, that this ethnic cleansing took place starting in 1948 during the 1948 war. What Palestinians called the Nakba is the dispossession of more than half of the Arab population of Palestine as a result of this campaign of ethnic cleansing. Many solutions have been proposed; the one that is best anchored in international law is a resolution that was passed by the United Nations General Assembly in December of 1948, Resolution 194, and that established the right to return and to compensation from all those driven from their homes in Palestine, on condition that they were prepared to live in peace. That's what resolution 194 says, and that is and should be the best legal basis for resolving this problem in a just and equitable manner.

There has been a process of further expulsion of Palestinians, several hundred thousand were driven out in the wake of the 1967 war, and others have been forced to leave via a variety of legal subterfuges and by a direct expulsion such



that of the original Arab population of Palestine. About half of their descendants now live outside of historic Palestine. However, about half of them live inside historic Palestine and many of them are also refugees in the sense that they are not allowed to return to their original homes within the Green Line, within what is now Israel.

I have suggested that the legal basis for a resolution of this issue the only and, in fact, the best legal basis would be General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948. But I want to enter into something else which is the moral dimension. It has a legal aspect but it is also important. The legal aspect is this: Palestinians have a right of residency in their ancestral homeland by right as the indigenous population of the country. They are a people and so they have the right also to national self-determination, they have the right to live in their own country, that say to return to it or to live in freedom within it and they have the right to return to it as a natural right of a people. Another right of a people established as long ago at the time of the League of Nations and more recently the covenant of the League of Nations and more recently with the charter of the United Nations is a right of national self-determination. This is one that Israeli Jews claim for themselves, it is one that Palestinians have of right, the natural right, but also in terms of international law, as long ago as the covenant of the league of nations reaffirmed in the charter of the united nations.

This means that Palestinians should have the right to live, not only to return and live in their homeland their ancestral homeland and to live obviously in peace and so forth, but to live as a people within their homeland. I am not going to go into how I think that might happen, how that right can be balanced by the right that Israelis claim to live in Palestine as Israelis, I would just suggest that in moral terms and also in political terms, any resolution, any fair and just and lasting resolution, has to rely on a number of principles. One of these principles is that there be absolute equality of rights between all concerned. If Israelis claim for themselves a right as people to national self-determination, Palestinians certainly, as the indigenous population of the country, have that right as well to national self-determination within their homeland. If Israelis claim the right to have their relatives from abroad, whether they've lived in Palestine or not whether they originally lived in Palestine or not, to come to Palestine under what is called the Law of Return that was passed in 1950. Then, Palestinians under any framework for a just and lasting solution, Palestinians have to have exactly the same right. If someone wants to bring his/her cousin from Brooklyn then I should have the right to come from Manhattan and to live freely as a citizen within my ancestral homeland.

The same applies to other kinds of rights: political rights, civil rights, religious rights. There has to be absolute equality and no solution that is not based on absolute equality in all of these terms national rights, religious rights, political

rights, civil rights, no solution that's not based on absolute equality is going to be lasting, is going to be sustainable, and is going to be just. I think that the issue of the right of return, which is a central issue for Palestinians, is also linked to the issue of self-determination, but has to be grounded in rights in the idea that what might apply or what applies to Israelis should and must apply as well to Palestinians. That means a number of important changes are going to have to take place, whatever solution ultimately evolves, whether it's a single state, a binational state, a cantonal state, two states is irrelevant, a number of important changes have to take place so that these principles of justice can become the basis of a lasting future for Palestinians, for Israelis, for everybody in Palestine.

One of the things that would have to for example be addressed, is the Jewish Nation State Law that was passed by the Israeli in 2018, which proclaimed that only one people, the Jewish people, has the right of self-determination within Israel; And given that the definition of Israel has increasingly become the entirety of Palestine that is to say Israel essentially is claiming all of historic Palestine from the river to the sea; What is being stated here is that there is only one people in Palestine and then there are others who live there at sufferance and that people is the Jewish people which has exclusive rights as a national entity. That is simply unacceptable, that is not just discriminatory, it is in fact inherently, it leads to politicize the destruction of a political entity, which is the Palestinian people. To claim that there is no people in Palestine except the Jewish people, which is now a constitutional pillar of the Israeli system, that law was passed as a basic law. The 2018 law means that an enormous obstacle has been placed in the way of any just fair lasting sustainable resolution of this conflict.

Let me conclude by saying to understand these things I think it's important to understand history. In the book that I mentioned, my book "Hundred Years' War on Palestine", I try and lay out how we got here, but I also try and suggest as I have tried to suggest in what I'm saying today a way out that involves basic principles of justice and of equality, what a right for one group have to be the basis for the same right for another group. I wish you all success with the Return Week. Thank you for hosting me, thank you to the organizers. I conclude by saying I hope that we will all live to see the day when justice and equality and peace prevail in Palestine.



Shabbir Lakha

That was brilliant! I hope you enjoyed that.